

PDGM Therapy Diagnosis Reference Tool: Use of Symptom Codes

Here is something you can work on now to make sure you're reimbursed for appropriate therapy services under PDGM!

We have found that many agencies use therapy related symptom codes as primary diagnoses. While current coding regulation permits the use of symptom codes on home care claims in certain circumstances, these codes may not fall into any of the clinical groups under PDGM and, are unlikely to describe the central reason for home health care. Use the information below to better understand this practice and what you can do to improve coordinated and interdisciplinary care planning and documentation for needed therapy services.

Examples of commonly used therapy related symptom codes that do not fall into one of the PDGM clinical groups:

- M62.81 - Muscle Weakness (generalized)
- R26.89 - Other abnormalities of gait and mobility
- M54.5 - Low back pain
- R26.81 - Unsteadiness of feet
- M25.561/M25.562 - Pain in right/left knee
- M25.551/M25.552 - Pain in right/left hip
- R29.6 - Repeated falls
- R13.10 - Dysphagia, unspecified
- M54.9 - Dorsalgia, unspecified
- M25.511/M25.512 - Pain in right/left shoulder

Coding guidance on appropriate use of symptom codes:

Coding regulation only permits the use of symptom codes on home care claims in these circumstances:

1. When a related definitive diagnosis is not known or cannot be confirmed by the physician.
2. When a symptom is not routinely considered an integral part of a disease, the symptom code may be used in conjunction with that diagnosis.

Best practice recommendations:

1. Educate intake teams, clinicians and coding staff/vendors on the use of symptom codes and, how they may not fit into a PDGM clinical group.
2. Develop processes for intake and clinician teams to query physicians for more definitive diagnoses in the presence of a primary symptom code.
3. Reinforce comprehensive plan of care development and the appropriate use of any symptoms codes through clinical record audits and care management activities.